

TREE-WORSHIP.

OUR purpose is not to speak of that part of the pagan theogony which transforms every bush and tree into so many gods, demi-gods, and goddesses, nymphs, fauns, satyrs, and hamadryads; nor do we refer to the symbolic or sacred character which the Greeks and Romans attributed to certain trees that their priesthood had consecrated to the deities: the myrtle, for instance, to Venus; the olive, to Mercury; the laurel, to Apollo. Our object is simply to mention the worship offered to trees by certain nations and tribes on account of their real or imaginary properties.

The Gauls entertained a peculiar veneration for the mistletoe. In the Gallic language, *gui*, or mistletoe, signified *plant*; and in the symbolic phraseology with which the Druids only were familiar, the word *chen*, meaning oak, or *the tree* of all others, stood for *force, power, authority*.

The oak mistletoe was gathered every year, in the month of December, by the high-priest of the Druids, or by the queen of the female Druids, with a golden sickle, and was received in the skirts of a white tunic.

The juice of the ivy was considered a very efficacious counterpoison, and a useful agent in promoting fecundity in animals.

In Germany, it was believed that no one who had a sprig of mistletoe about his person could be wounded, and that he was even certain to hit those at whom he aimed his arrows. However, the Germans never rendered worship to the ivy or the oak, as the Druids did in their mysterious forests.

The ancient people of India, if we are to believe Quintus Curtius, had a profound veneration for certain trees, before which they were in the habit of kneeling, in the attitude of devotion; and the most terrible punishment awaited the sacrilegious transgressor who might dare to injure one of them.

In Persia, there are two kinds of trees that are worshipped to this day. The one is the *dirakeh-i-fusel*, or, *tree that surpasses the rest*; the other is the *dir-dar*, or *tree of the genii*. The true believers decorate these trees with strips of precious stuffs. The ancient Persians had a particular veneration for the *barrom*, a gigantic tree, over which the sun, as they believed, kept watch in an especial manner.

The Orientals, generally, have always had an exceptional respect for the cypress.

When Xerxes bedecked a plane-tree that he met with on his march, with ornaments, it was not, as has been foolishly related, through an absurd, insensate passion for the mute plant, but through religious feeling.

The Ouigours, a people of northern Guinea, worshipped the cypress and the birch. The ceremonies of this curious rite took their origin in a legend relative to the establishment of their kingdom.

One day, says the legend, there suddenly rose out of the ground, at the confluence of the two principal rivers, two marvellous trees, that gave forth melodious sounds as they shot up into the air.

When they had grown large and were covered with leaves, they opened from top to bottom, and there stepped forth from them five children, one of whom became the king of the Ouigours. When these children had grown up, they approached the trees with great respect, and the latter spoke to them, giving them good advice, and wishing them long life and great renown. Thenceforth the Ouigours, seeing in the cypress and the birch the cradles of their first king and first lawgivers, rendered to these trees the homage that we offer to the real God.

Beside these trees, which superstition has elevated to divinity, may naturally be placed certain other productions of the vegetable realm, which ignorance and prejudice have, at different periods, made the object of the admiration, the wonder, or the awe of races of men. Of this number is the upas-tree, that grows on the island of Java. Travellers relate that this tree exhales a poison so virulent, that all other vegetation in the neighborhood is destroyed. Not a bush nor a blade of grass is to be found in the valley where the upas grows. The surrounding mountains are sterile rocks. This terrible spot has neither birds, quadrupeds, nor reptiles. Here and there is seen, bleaching on the ground, the skeleton of some hapless wretch who, having been condemned to death, had obtained the poor favor of an attempt to purchase his life by trying to gather the upas-poison for the sultan.

Such was the fable narrated by a Dutch surgeon in 1783, and subsequently contradicted by Dr. Horsfield. From the statement of the English botanist, it appears that the upas-tree does indeed contain a poisonous juice that flows from it when an incision is made in its trunk, and that arrows, dipped in this sap, inflict mortal wounds. But, far from causing other plants near it to perish, the upas of Java, found also at Macassar and elsewhere in great abundance, flourishes in dense forests only.

Similar fables have been told concerning the Sicilian manna-tree. The story was, at one time, prevalent that, upon a certain occasion, when the King of Naples was about to wall in the gardens of Enotria, which produce the best manna of Calabria, and subject the product to taxation, the manna dried up suddenly, and did not appear again until the tax was abandoned. Now, this legend simply masks a gentle hint to governments disposed to grind the people.

The bread-tree, also, has given rise to singular stories. Rumphius, the Dutch traveller, once affirmed that the variety known as the *Jaquier heterophyllis*, yields fruit so large, that a man cannot lift one of them! The truth is, that the fruit of the real tree is about double the size of a man's fist. It grows for eight months, and then is fit to pluck. For eating, it is cut in slices, and broiled on hot coals, or baked in an oven. When it commences to blacken with the heat, the burnt part is scraped off, and beneath it is found a sort of white, mealy pulp, as tender as the crumb of fresh bread, and greatly resembling in flavor a good wheaten loaf.

We now come to the *Dry-Tree*. A traveller of the thirteenth century, one William de Mandeville, has given a lengthy description of this wonderful tree, of which some theologians, not greatly troubled with scruples of conscience, speak in their books. The Dry-Tree, ac-

cording to their statements, grows not far from the tomb of Lot. It has been there since the beginning of the world, and, until the death of Christ, was always covered with green leaves. At the moment when Jesus breathed His last, all its leaves fell, and its trunk and branches instantly dried up, but without the tree itself dying.

William de Mandeville terminates his recital as follows: "Some prophecies say that a prince of the West shall win the Land of Promise by the aid of the Christians, and will have mass performed under the Dry-Tree, and that then the tree will become green again, and bear leaves. By this miracle many Saracens and many Jews will be converted to the Christian faith. For this reason, the tree is held in great veneration, and carefully and affectionately tended."

The good people of the middle ages were persuaded that it sufficed to have about one's person a piece of the Dry-Tree in order to be safe from nearly all the maladies that afflict the human species.

But even among Christians and enlightened people of the most modern day, there are some trees and plants that awaken emotions of reverence. Who, for instance, could gaze unmoved upon the few lonely cedars of Lebanon, the sole remaining witnesses of Biblical days and incidents? Of these but thirty were left in A. D. 1550; twenty-four in 1600; twenty-two in 1650; sixteen in 1700, and only seven in 1800.

The weeping willow and the sombre yew are ineradicably associated in our minds with the scenery of the churchyard; and quite as naturally, although through habit merely, do we connect the laurel and the vine-wreath with thoughts of triumph and festivity.

The witch-hazel and several of its kindred enjoy the credit of possessing supernatural qualities among the peasantry of all Europe to this day, and to thousands that "rare old plant, the ivy green," is still an object of superstitious regard.

Religion, in all ages and climes, has found powerful auxiliaries and exquisite symbols in the garden and the grove.

SPEED OF UTTERANCE IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.

THE understanding of the spoken language in Italian, Spanish, and German, presents great facilities, owing to the correspondence between the pronunciation and the orthography. But the most difficult of all languages for a foreigner to understand is perhaps the English, on account of the complete absence of analogy in the alphabetical representation of its pronunciation, as well as of the rapidity with which it is spoken and its innumerable contractions.

This is humorously illustrated in the following anecdote: In a late trial before the Queen's Bench, Mr. Hawkins, a barrister, had frequently to advert to that description of vehicle called brougham, which he pronounced in two syllables. Lord Campbell, the chief justice, suggested that the word was usually contracted to broom, and that he had better adopt the latter pronunciation, as he would thereby save one syllable and gain so much time. Henceforward Mr. Hawkins called it broom. Shortly after, the pleading turned upon omnibuses; and Lord Campbell frequently used the word omnibus, to which he gave its due length. "I beg your lordship's pardon," retorted Mr. Hawkins, "but, if you will call it bus, you will save two syllables, and make it more intelligible to the jury." The learned judge assented to the proposed abbreviation.

Some people think that the French language is spoken faster than the English; this is a great error. Voltaire shrewdly observed, that an Englishman gains every day two hours on a Frenchman in conversation. The truth is, that English is spoken considerably quicker than French. This results from a difference of kind in the pronunciation of these languages.

Pronunciation is composed of two elements, vocal sounds and articulations, represented in writing by vowels and consonants. Vocal sounds admit of duration: quantity is their essence. Vocal articulations, with few exceptions, cannot be prolonged: instantaneity is their essence. When a consonant is placed after a vowel, it generally shortens it. Thus the long syllables, *me*, *we*, *fie*, *no*, *due*, *though*, become short by adding consonants to them, *met*, *web*, *fib*, *fit*, *fig*, *not*, *dun*, *thought*. Now, in English, consonants predominate, and usually form the end of syllables; hence a rapidity of utterance is the unavoidable consequence.

In French, on the contrary, consonants act but a secondary part, and are often silent. The spoken words, in reality, end with vowel-